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**Social Policy Ideas by the World Bank**  
**Comparing Pensions, Health Systems and Labour Policy Models**

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## **Social Policy Ideas by the World Bank**

### **Comparing Pensions, Health Systems and Labour Policy Models**

#### ***Introduction***

This paper analyses social policy ideas by the World Bank in a comparative perspective. It discusses the question whether or not we can observe a “standard” type of ideas or models developed within and disseminated by the World Bank. The underlying problem is that global social policy research, particularly regarding the World Bank and other international financial institutions, is often driven by rather normative approaches with prejudices about a particular (neoliberal) type of policy advice. The focus is, then, often on “where” you can find evidence for this, than on a systematic analysis of different social policy fields. This paper asks: How do different social policy fields that form part of World Bank advice compare? To what extent is there such a “mainstream” set of social policy ideas across different social policy fields? Don’t we rather see different advice and approaches in different social policy fields? How does such a comparison challenge existing characterisations and methodologies of global social policy research and literature?

In order to facilitate the discussion of these questions, the paper proceeds in five steps:

- (1) global social policy is defined in different dimensions and characteristics.
- (2) methodological approaches to global social policy phenomena are discussed developing the specific perspective guiding the analysis reported in this paper.
- (3) a review of the specific literature on the World Bank as a global social policy actors leads over to
- (4) the systematic comparison of three social policy fields (pensions, health systems and labour policy).
- (5) The findings from this comparison are then reflected as to the consequences for definitions of and approaches to *global social policy*

#### ***Global Social Policy***

Given the continued focus in the social policy and welfare state literature on national and comparative social policy, global social policy as a field is not represented by a particularly large body of literature. With a rather broad focus, the topic has been approached most comprehensively by Bob Deacon (particularly Deacon 2007, 2006, 1997), but also by Nicola Yeates (2008, 2001) and Lutz Leisering (2005, 2007). More recently, the role of international organisations for social policy has been discussed in Ervik et al. (2009).

*Global social policy* as such has been understood and framed in different ways. This paper refers to two specific aspects: on the one hand, the distinction between different dimensions or mechanisms of global social policy, and on the other hand, the rather normative characterisations of global social governance and ideas prevailing in global social policy literature.

Deacon (2007:1) distinguishes two *dimensions* or *mechanisms* of global social policy: (1) policy prescriptions for national social policy or different social policy sectors, and (2) a supranational social policy understood as global redistribution, regulation and rights. The governance of these issues includes global policy actors and coalitions across different policy levels or scales, as well various dissemination strategies (Orenstein 2005; Leisering 2007; Deacon 2007).

*Global social redistribution* means a compilation of policies and issues, mainly in the context of development policy. It is about aid and its effectiveness, debt relief and international finance facilities and global funds. Global redistribution does not happen as part of a so-designed “global welfare state” (see discussion in Leisering 2007), but means development assistance, or – in a more critical sense – also financial flows from the South to the North in terms of cheap products and labour. Concerning *global social regulation*, critical issues are international or global labour and social standards, trade matters, voluntary codes of conduct by business, global tax regulation and migration. As the third element of a supranational global social policy, *global social rights* have to be considered. These represent a particular type of rights as – compared to civil and political rights – they require resources in order to be met (Deacon 2007:136). Such social rights have been formulated, amongst others, in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1976, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1990 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1976. Rights issues are particularly important in the context of gender, ethnicity or other issues that are prone to discriminatory practices; and include health-related rights (see for example Deacon 2007; Mishra 1999; Tarantola 2008).

These forms of supranational social policies are different from transnational efforts to provide policy prescriptions for national social policies. Not always, though this distinction is clear-cut, and some global social policy topics and debates cross-cut the two dimensions, both empirically and as a methodological issue in global social policy studies.

Looking at *global social policy prescriptions*, we are faced with considerable activity of diverse global actors in developing ideas and models about various fields of (national) social policy or welfare states. For pension policy, a number of authors have studied an advanced global discourse involving global social policy actors and coalitions (e.g. Deacon et al. 1997, Orenstein 2005). Other social protection issues dealt with transnationally are also social protection mechanisms with regard to unemployment, social assistance (“safety nets”) or family policy issues. Health systems (or health policy more generally) are increasingly be found at global agendas. The same is true for education, habitat, land, and housing issues, to only mention a few.

Turning to the aspect of *normative stances* in global social policy research, literature has frequently pointed to global social governance being characterised by different global institutions promoting different, contradictory policy models, which generates controversial global discourses about desirable national social policy. The specific ideas that form part of these discourses are connected to particular international organisations, other global social policy actors and associated networks or epistemic communities. In 1997, Deacon et al. described this as evidence for a new “locus of the future ideological and political struggles for better global and national social policies” (p.10) at the global level. Later, Deacon (2007:171) summarised:

*Thus the ideas about desirable national policy carried out and argued for by the international organisations [...] reveals something approaching a 'war of position' between those agencies and actors within them who have argued for a more selective, residual role for the state together with a larger role for private actors in health, social protection and education provision and those who took the opposite view. This division of opinion often reflected a disagreement as to whether the reduction of poverty was a matter of targeting specific resources on the most poor, or whether it was a matter of major social and political-institutional change involving a shift in power relations and a significant increase in redistribution from rich to poor. It does seem, in 2006, that the tide has turned against the targeting and privatising view [...]*

This overall description of global social policy and its content in terms of policy ideas leaves relatively little space to the possibility that different global social policy discourses might show different characteristics. Changes over time seem to be regarded as movements between the predominance of two different ideologies while in principle there might be developments in terms of the comprehensiveness of policy models or the development of a specific social policy discourse as well.

This paper focuses on the dimension of global social policy prescriptions for national social policy in the fields of pensions, health systems and labour policy. This is further conceptualised as a study of ideas in forms of rather comprehensive models of national social policy.

### ***Global Social Policy and Comparative Methodology***

In the global social policy literature there is much focus on discourses on the one hand, or the knowledge production within on particular global social governance institution. Analyses typically centre around global social policy *ideas*. McNeill (2005:58) defines ideas as “collective images” that powerfully influence policy and that develop through the “interplay between the academic and policy domains”, and Emmerji et al. (2005:214) as those “normative or causal beliefs held by individuals or adopted by institutions that influence their attitudes and actions”. Normative ideas are “broad, general ideas about what the world should look like”; and causal ideas describe “more operational motives about what strategy will have the desired result or what tactics will achieve a particular strategy” (Emmerji et al. 2005:214; see also Beyeler 2004). Ideas matter in two ways: on the one hand, in the form of *shared ideas* they serve the goals of achieving consensus across institutions and between member states at the international level. On the other hand, *contesting ideas* between different actors at the global level can be observed.

When it comes to their potential influence, Beyeler (2004:4) defines ideas more narrowly as models or theories providing solutions to problems, thus as alternative theories that seem to be more appropriate to a problem. Orenstein (2003) states, though, that a crisis in a policy field is not sufficient for a policy innovation. Sikkink (1991:248) further stresses the point that “if these ideas do not find institutional homes, they will not be able to sustain themselves over the long term”. In turn, this also means that the decisions an actor takes are dependent on the institutionally-defined roles (March and Olsen 1989), and a new idea will be more powerful or influential if it fits well with already existing ideas (Sikkink 1991; Beyeler 2004). At the same time, Maxwell and Stone (2005) and McNeill (2005) argue that ideas can also be sources of

power independent of providing solutions to particular (national) problems or bound to institutional homes, but also for the power of, and relationship between, international organisations.

Given this focus on ideas, global social policy studies often are based on discourse analysis of some kind guiding the research. At the same time, at the very basis of judgements about the difference of policy ideas, there must be a comparison of them. While global social policy research originally grew out and is still linked to comparative and international welfare state research, comparative methodology does not seem to be reflected in global social policy designs. Are the cases studied comparable? How are they comparable? How do we generate overall characterisations of global social policy and governance based on this?

There is little literature about comparing global governance, such as (Gruber 2000, Koremanos, Lipson, Snidal 2001). A new research project at the University of Stockholm has recently been started to go into such issues.<sup>1</sup> However, there seems to be up to nothing on the comparability of (global) policy ideas. In terms of approach, Koivusalo and Ollila (1997) do an analysis of global health policy and governance in a comparatively structured way, however not with the intention of theorising their approach. Questions that arise do not only concern the comparability of global ideas but also the applicability of “(inter)national” comparative welfare state research methods to comparing global ideas and models that are rather abstract.

Literature on knowledge production and innovation research might provide a link here.

The current emphasis and interest in global social policy literature seems to be rather on looking at instances where particular understandings and normative positions are replicated. However, if the aim is to develop global social policy research to provide a stronger theoretical basis (beyond its claim to provide normative guidance) a better understanding of the comparability of cases and ideas is strongly needed. This can serve as a stronger basis to judging the nature and content of global social policy ideas.

This paper explores a comparative approach looking at different social policy models proposed by the World Bank in order to reflect on the implications for studying and understanding global social policy. The central question in this study is not *if* or *how* ideas matter concretely, but to understand the content and the ways to disseminate them.

Based on the assumption that so far, mainly the analysis of the global pensions discourse, involving the World Bank as an important actor, has served for characterising global social policy discourses, the aim of this paper is to compare the World Bank ideas about pensions with those about health systems and labour markets (both understood as parts of typical social policy or welfare state arrangements). What do we learn from such a comparison? Do the current global social policy characterisations hold true? What are the implications for definitions of global social policy or governance informing current global social policy research?

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.statsvet.su.se/English/Research/transaccess.html>

### ***The World Bank as a Global Social Policy Actor***

The World Bank, indeed, is only an example of global social policy actors, a prominent one, though. It is one important voice in global social policy discourses, that is usually been described by using the term *neoliberal* when referring to its policy advice. Particularly normatively driven literature is quite critical of the World Bank's performance in several perspectives: its neoliberal policy advice, the US dominance within the organisation, the power it gains through putting conditionalities in its loans, for the predominance of economic thinking within World Bank work to the detriment of social, cultural or other perspectives, and so on.

[still to be completed]

### ***Global Pensions, Health and Labour Discourses in a Comparative Perspective***

All three social policy fields analysed in this paper are those dealt within the World Bank's Human Development Network – namely in the Social Protection (SP) and Health, Nutrition and Population (HNP) sectors. Pensions and labour markets are dealt with under the roof of social protection, while health systems as a part of the HNP strategy.

#### *Pensions*

Global pension policy has been done most research on. Both Orenstein (2005) and Ervik (2005) have analysed the role of the World Bank in the development, transfer and implementation of the “new pension reform”. Further literature has focused on the World Bank's pension policy in a broader global actor perspective (Deacon 2007; Deacon et al. 1997; Queisser 2000; Orenstein 2008).

This literature has shown that, initially, through a flagship report entitled *Averting the Old Age Crisis* (World Bank 1994) the World Bank disseminated a particular pension model that became widely spread and has influenced thinking and policy making in the field of pension reform considerably.

The pension model promoted is comprised of three pillars. The first one is a public one, ensuring a very low basic pension (redistribution). The second pillar is supposed to be a compulsory private pillar is, funded and managed privately (savings), and the third pillar is open to any desire for further protection funded privately. By this way, the redistributive and income-related benefits function in different pillars. More recent publications on pensions, as well as the formulation and review of the social security strategy (Holzmann 2009; World Bank - Human Development Network 2001), and carry on the reasoning of earlier work.

While differing in its pension model considerably from the actual case of Chile (Orenstein 2008:78), the model, amongst other things, built on the case of Chilean pension reform and the example was used to teach policy-makers from other countries. Chile had implemented pension privatisation reforms in the end of the 1970s and early 1980s with the involvement of transnational epistemic communities.

These ideas also streamlined further World Bank activities. *Averting the Old Age Crisis* was followed and supplemented by a *Pension Primer* to help governments to design and implement reforms<sup>2</sup>, and the Bank's Pension Reforms Option Simulation Toolkit (PROST) (a standard actuarial software for quantitative analysis).

Further, the World Bank Institute is teaching flagship courses on pension policy.

### Health Systems

Turning to health systems, the World Bank's health activities are the focus of contributions from Ruger (2005) and Beyer et al. (2000); and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) also gained attention as an emerging actor in global health (see Wogart 2003; Lethbridge 2005). Brunet-Jailly (1999) discussed the question whether or not the World Bank had a health strategy at all. As a social policy field, health (health systems) have been much less comprehensively and thoroughly studied compared to the pensions discourse, or the focus is often on issues that are only marginally connected to social policy as a matter of coverage, access or financing. Global social policy scholars studying global health policy have recently rather focused on trade agreements and the WTO.

The 1993 World Development Report *Investing in Health* is frequently referred to in global health literature both by international organisations and also parts of the academic literature, but it would be an exaggeration to state that these had a similar dimension as *Averting the Old Age Crisis*. The WDR1993 had not been given a status as the *Averting* report, referred to as "flagship report". Thus the dissemination process – that has been particularly conscious and extensive for the *Averting* report (Orenstein 2008) – has been different.

The World Bank's engagement regarding health systems has increased ever since the 1980s, not only in scale, but also in how comprehensively health systems have been understood. The first major contribution in terms of ideas was the WDR1993 that provoked a number of controversial debates such as on user fees and privatisation (see for example Brugha and Zwi 2002). The World Bank's take on the issue, focus and ideas have changed and concretised since then.

On health *provision*, while an actor-mix is the option, the stress used to be more on the advantages of private providers and decentralisation (via District Hospitals) (World Bank 1993). The 1997 Strategy Paper (World Bank 1997) continued with the idea of a mix, however, concrete models are not discussed. The recent 2007 strategy paper (World Bank 2007) also promotes the mix, but here it is particularly concerned with the importance of building up a coherent system. The WDR2004 had made explicit that neither type of provider (public or private) would be better as such and had expressed caution about decentralisation in service provision.

On *financing* the WDR1993 had proposed reducing government expenditure for other than basic health care and public health interventions. The concern was – and can still be seen in some of

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See

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALPROTECTION/EXTPENSIONS/0,,contentMDK:20579507~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:396253,00.html>

today's policy papers by World Bank staff (Gwatkin et al. 2005; Yazbeck 2006) – that scarce public spending could be wasted on rich people, who could also buy their health care to the detriment of the poor. As this only concerns the public-private distinction in terms of state/taxation versus out-of-pocket spending, the question of decentralisation (at the level of pooling) becomes obsolete. The 1997 strategy paper also marks a change in this regard; the issue being risk-protection and pooling mechanisms (plus the mobilisation of additional resources). At the same time, it continues to state that essential health services should be financed publicly. (De)centralisation is still not an issue in the debate and the issue of user fees which was an important element in earlier work and discussions, has almost disappeared. This more or less continues for the 2007 strategy paper. Here, however, it is mentioned that decentralisation in health financing is probably not useful, nevertheless, community financing could be a means to extending coverage.

On *regulation*, the WDR1993 gives governments an important role in regulating private and social health insurance, defining the benefit package according to cost-effectiveness criteria and other areas such as giving particular attention to women's rights and status, and to monitor health provision and financing. This, again, sounds different in the 1997 strategy paper: here, the state is made responsible for securing equitable, universal access (combined with some targeting) to preventive and curative care; and for controlling public and private expenditure and provision. The regulatory role of the state should be strengthened, while for the other functions, private involvement should be increased. This, again, is similar in the 2007 paper. In contrast, the WDR2004 had been more explicit with regard to cross-subsidies through insurance or general taxation. Risk-pooling is now an important component of ideas on health financing (World Bank 2007).

While publications on health systems use and refer to good practices in particular countries, there is no "Chile" for a health system. Most notably, the US is typically mentioned as the bad case.

Accordingly, there are various ideas around health systems and their functions, and a clear development of such ideas over time can be observed, it does not add up to one coherent model promoted by the World Bank.

Comparably to pensions, the World Bank has developed a simulation toolkit, HROST.

Similar to the pension story, the World Bank has also developed a flagship course on health systems that – given the teaching material used (Roberts et al. 2008; WHO 2000; Gottret and Schieber 2006) – does not appear to provide evidence for the promotion of privatisation or similar "neoliberal attributes" to health systems.

### Labour Policy

Finally, on labour policy issues, the global social policy literature is primarily located in aspects of transnational social policies such as global regulation or human rights, ILO conventions or corporate social responsibility. However, O'Brien (2008) also briefly addresses issues of policy prescriptions such as the ILO Decent Work agenda, and the implications of conditional loans by international financial institutions. There is evidence for a typical controversy between the World

Bank/IMF ideas (more flexible and cheap labour to increase competitiveness) and those of the ILO (without proper labour market institutions, macroeconomic stabilisation plans risk failure) (O'Brien 2008:133).

The basic strategy for unemployment protection is usually to be found in the 2001 strategy (World Bank - Human Development Network 2001), and has to some extent been updated recently (Holzmann 2009). There do not seem to be other reports that treat the issues that are usually summarised in social policy studies on labour markets (employment protection, unemployment insurance, active labour market policies (ALMP)). Some of these issues, particularly ALMPs are dealt with in some publications.

Labour market policy at the Bank is not as independently treated as it is in OECD welfare state research. It is rather seen within a broader concept of Social Risk Management (SRM). Actually pensions is also part of this but the discussion and concepts around pensions appears to be more independent and conclusive than those with regard to labour market policies. Labour market policies within the SRM Framework are mainly located in what needs to be provided publicly and extends over all three dimensions of the SRM framework, risk reduction, risk mitigation and risk coping. Risk reduction includes labour market policies, such as employment protection (severance pay), risk mitigation is about unemployment insurance and assistance and unemployment insurance savings accounts. Risk coping translates into active labour market programmes, including job search assistance, training, employment subsidies and public works.

The language used to explain the engagement in labour markets is, on the first sight, driven by economic and growth thinking, and as if equity and quality of life concerns were rather rhetorical. However, as in the case of health, labour markets are defined as being different from other markets which is the reason for government interventions into the sector, with advantages and disadvantages.

While the former strategy documents generally talked about the support of “informal and market-based social protection arrangements” (World Bank - Human Development Network 2001:Foreword), Vodopivec et al. (Vodopivec et al. 2009) are more specific and broader in their perspective of where future Bank activities in the matter should be going. The updated strategy, however, does not include a general and necessary support, for example of unemployment insurance as such. Already the 2001 strategy had stated that “unemployment insurance probably inappropriate for most developing and transition countries, in which shocks are more covariant, the informal sector is larger, and administrative capacity is low. Alternative instruments could include means-tested unemployment assistance, public works programs, and severance pay from earmarked individual savings accounts (a still largely untested measure)” (World Bank - Human Development Network 2001: 33). However, the updated one is more concerned about equity (also with reference to the World Development Report 2006 on Equity (World Bank 2005)).

With regard to minimum wages, “the evidence is rather inconclusive on whether minimum wages leave low-paid workers better off” (REF), but “The evidence strongly suggests that an increase in minimum wage tends to have a positive wage effect and a small negative employment effect among workers covered by minimum wage legislation and that the effects tend to be stronger among low-wage earners.” (REF).

Along with the just evolving and fragmented work on labour markets, the ideas that can be found in the existing documents appear somewhat ambiguous. For example, a recent primer about labour market reactions response to the financial crisis, leaves one seriously wonder, if current protection of workers really should be organised at the individual level and going at the expense of own pension savings. At the same time, this primer recommends for middle-income countries the expansion of income support programmes for the unemployed and active labour market programmes, including boosting unemployment insurance benefits. For low-income countries the prescriptions are on public works programmes and targeted micro-credit schemes. But governments are advised to avoid the increase of public sector employment and wages (= expensive interventions with limited pro-poor impact), increases in minimum wages (= questionable; rather harmful for employment, negative effects on employment of less-skilled workers, women and youth), and early retirement programmes (fiscally expensive; failing to promote the employment of young workers – contrary to the stated goal) (HD and PREM Labor Market Teams, April 2009).

Thus, so far, the prescriptions seem to have mostly centred around specific instruments such as ALMPs, missing to develop a broader concept of what appropriate labour market policies should be and particularly what unemployment protection schemes could look like.

However, indeed, with regard to these elements of labour market policy, the talk is about privatisation and marketisation. At the same time, there is an operational policy framework called MILES including social protection as part of a comprehensive labour market strategy: Social protection is explained as follows:

*S – Social Protection. A strong and balanced social protection scheme protects the income of workers from shocks to employment. In many developing countries, the task of cushioning adjustment costs for workers is hampered by a narrow tax base. But even within limited resources, improving the insurance component in income support schemes and the pooling the risks across individuals can go a long way to smooth adjustment costs for workers. Providing income support to the unemployed would not only smooth the cost of labour mobility for those directly affected but, by facilitating the matching process in the labour market, also improve the employment prospects of the unemployed and the overall efficiency of the economy. Moreover, if well-designed ALMPs can also contribute to facilitate the matching of workers to jobs and support business incubators to generate supportive self-employment. Many other social protection schemes also have a direct or indirect effect on job creation, social risk management programs, if well designed and implemented, can potentially enhance efficiency and the proper allocation of resources. First, social insurance schemes can stimulate the emergence of more risky, but more productive jobs and industries. Second, uninsured transient shocks which reduce individual consumption below a threshold needed to retain productivity can give rise to “dynamic poverty traps” and lead to chronic poverty. Third, uninsured risk also reduces in efficiency through costly production and portfolio choices, such as the use of outdated, but less risky production technologies, or holding live stock as a form of precautionary savings. Fourth, uninsured risk can adversely affect human capital accumulation, for example, when children are forced to drop out of school in the wake of an income shock in the household. (REF)*

Interesting is the result of a stocktaking exercise in 2003 coming up, amongst other things, with the following issues: (1) Employment needs to be more in focus in development debates, with a different view on how labour markets contribute to employment, poverty reduction and economic growth. (2) There is a considerable difference in the importance of labour market across regions and countries. (3) A lack of “agreed-on labour market models” was declared, and “model uncertainty” (REF).

Comparably to the other two social policy fields, the World Bank Institute runs courses on labour market policies and has developed a simulation toolkit, UISIM (Unemployment Insurance Simulation Model).

Though not nearly as comprehensive a model as in pensions and even at a much earlier stage than health system ideas, some similarities and differences can be observed. The labour market ideas show a much clearer difference between low- and middle-income countries (e.g. primer about financial crisis). The view that labour markets are very different in different countries seems to be more expressed than in pensions (where one general starting point is changed demographics that actually affect about all countries), and health systems (where the need to provide a certain level of health to all, best funded by collective risk pooling seems to be rather consensual). The new labour market research strategy seems to move towards regional approaches, as is addressed in the literature by Deacon et al. (2009).

### *Discussing global social policy theory*

What does the comparison of these three social policy fields considered in the theoretical work of the World Bank imply for theorising global social policy?

The ways of dealing with and disseminating these different social policy ideas or models looks rather similar. The discussions are clearly linked to the overall aim of the World Bank to reduce poverty and support economic growth. In that the language is often rather economic-style than social policy style (which is not meant to be a statement about the *content* of models). We find similar strategies as to what kind of documents are used and the way workshops are organised.

In the beginning, it was pointed to a concern about the characterisation of global social policy being comprised of different (groups of) global social policy actors that are in a struggle over ideas, namely different social policy models, only being developed upon one, perhaps rather specific, case of global social policy, namely pensions. Global social policy literature has, further, typically referred to the World Bank as an actor expressing rather neoliberal social policy models, calling for privatisation and individualisation in social security. The analysis reported in this paper shows both supportive and unsupportive evidence for this characterisation. In all three social policy fields, pensions, health systems and labour policy, there are issues that clearly follow this logic. In pensions, this is most clearly by the integration of important private insurance pillars into the proposed three-pillar system, in health the global discussion about users fees clearly follows this structure (while there is also evidence that the World Bank, over the time, has become much more

careful with supporting them), regarding labour policy, there is not even a clear support yet about the need of unemployment insurance.

The comparison of these social policy concepts brought forward by the Bank suggests that we are faced with a fairly comprehensive model for pensions, a fragmented model with significant uncertainties regarding health systems, and a considerable underdeveloped one for labour policies. For developing a broader definition of global social policy (in its description dimension) this means that the scope for explicit and developed social policy discourses (war of ideas) on specific social policy fields is severely hampered by the incomplete models. This does not mean that there are not also health and labour issue disagreements but too a much lesser extent at a level of broader concepts or models than related to specific aspects or interventions.

Overall, it is very questionable, though, if the policy models can be compared in its comprehensiveness. This implies that, if global social policy is more than looking for evidence supporting its basic characterisation, we have to reconsider how it is described more nuanced. The issue of pensions is driven by a clear model than only very marginally takes into account other rationales. Health systems is way more characterised by exploring different models, not ending up with a final, comprehensive policy model (uncertainty). Labour policy is characterised by very incomplete models. Thus, the fact that the different social policy models differ considerably in terms of their comprehensiveness and completedness questions the very possibility of developed social policy discourses at the global level that develop much implication regarding the influence on national social policies.

Clearly the models all have developed over time. This may include forth- and back-shifts depending on prevailing ideologies at specific times, however this also means that when it concerns theoretical models more and more issues and aspects might be included without necessarily arriving (or the intention to arrive at) a particular, comprehensive and clearly defined model. However, once such a model is in place, such as with pensions, this seems to be rather sustainable in its message over time, as suggested by Orenstein (2008):

*Averting represented a turning point in the global pension reform effort. It was important for two reasons: first, it represented a major advance in pension reform thinking and, second, the process of writing and disseminating the work helped to establish a large group of pension privatization experts and a broad consensus within the Bank on pension privatization methods.*

This implies that, while the attention given to specific social policy aspects might go up and down, we can assume that teams within the Bank aim at arriving at a stage that the pensions model has reached, particularly looking at the plans for labour markets. In health, it is less clear if there is the aim – or perhaps hope – to arrive at a clear-cut model.

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